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SUBJECT: RUSSIAN PUBLIC REACTIONS TO UKRAINE ELECTIONS

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Russian press and analysts in public statements overwhelmingly welcomed Viktor Yanukovich's victory in the February 7 presidential run-off elections in Ukraine, although they do not expect Yanukovich to be a pro-Russian push-over. Some see his victory as the end of Orange revolution ideas, while others enviously point to Ukraine's freedom of choice as a fruit of the revolution. Almost all expect Yanukovich to continue Ukraine's course towards western integration (apart from NATO). In the eyes of some, Yulia Tymoshenko's political career has passed its prime. End Summary.

Congratulations

¶2. (SBU) Despite the close result of the February 7 Ukrainian presidential run-off elections and allegations from second-placed Yulia Tymoshenko about fraud, Russia has recognized the results of elections. On February 9, President Medvedev congratulated Viktor Yanukovich on what the Kremlin cautiously phrased as the "completion of the election campaign" and Yanukovich's success in the presidential elections. The MFA issued a statement hoping that the new administration of "friendly Ukraine" will develop good-neighborly relations with Russia. Patriarch Kirill, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, congratulated Yanukovich on his victory and praised Yanukovich for having the talent and experience to justify the trust placed in him. Although State Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov suggested that Yanukovich should only be congratulated after his inauguration, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy, leader of the Liberal Democratic Party, was among the first to congratulate Yanukovich. He also sent a consolation letter to Tymoshenko.

¶3. (SBU) Russian political analysts such as Duma Deputy Konstantin Zatulin agreed with Presidential adviser Viktor Chernomyrdin that mass protests against the results of election were unlikely. Former State Duma deputy Vladimir Ryzhkov stated publicly that if Russia, the U.S., and the EU all recognized Yanukovich's victory, there would be no chance for street protests.

Orange Revolution

¶4. (SBU) Pundits are divided over whether Yanukovich's victory spells the defeat of the Orange Revolution. Ryzhkov thought the elections confirmed the principles of the Orange Revolution because it showed Ukraine possessed freedom of speech and competitive elections. Matvey Ganapolskiy on the independent radio station Ekho Moskvii praised Ukrainians for being free to choose anyone they liked to be Ukrainian president.

¶5. (SBU) Zatulin said Yanukovich's victory showed the "orange color has lost appeal much faster than the red", and accused the Orange Revolution parties of splitting the country. Pro-government daily

Izvestia noted that the revolutionary fervor of five years ago was gone.

Yanukovych's policies

16. (SBU) Although the chairman of the Russian State Duma International Affairs Committee, Konstantin Kosachev, praised Yanukovych on Russian Defense Ministry-controlled Zvezda TV for "aspiring to become a national leader," analysts are not all starry-eyed about Yanukovych. Former Head of Russian Presidential Administration Internal Policy Directorate Modesty Kolerov called Yanukovych a weak politician who will not be able to maintain his achievements, due to his need to balance between Western and Eastern Ukraine, Russia and the West, nationalists and Russian-speakers, and various business groups.

17. (SBU) Almost all experts and politicians expect Yanukovych to continue Ukraine's course towards western integration, albeit without anti-Russian rhetoric. Chief editor of the academic journal "Russia in Global Politics", Fedor Lukyanov, believes that Yanukovych will continue former president Kuchma's policy -- "very careful movement toward the West, but with curtsies in the direction of Russia" -- in part to secure budgetary assistance from both sides. General Director of the Center for Political Technologies Igor Bunin predicts renewed bargaining with Russia over gas prices, but agreed with Sergei Strokan's Kommersant op-ed that Yanukovych's "gas blackmail" will be less dramatic than Belarus'. Deputy General Director of the Center for Political Technologies Boris Makarenko suggested that Russia could strengthen its relations with Ukraine by deepening its own cooperation with the EU.

18. (SBU) In contrast, Leonid Slutsky, First Deputy Chairman of the Committee on International Affairs of the Duma, went as far as to

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suggest that Yanukovych might seek the "integration" of the Ukraine with Russia.

Tymoshenko

19. (SBU) Kosachev said that Tymoshenko's unwillingness to concede was a test of her commitment to democracy. He accused her, like President Yushchenko, of acting in the interest of her party and not Ukraine's national interest. Many Russian experts agree that Tymoshenko used her administrative resources in Western Ukraine to inflate her vote. Duma Deputy Sergey Markov, who was a member of the State Duma delegation of election observers, suggested 2.5 percent of ballots in Tymoshenko's favor were fraudulent. Igor Bunin believed her campaign was too aggressive, and focused on ideas only popular in Western Ukraine. Examples are the glorification of Stepan Bandera and other nationalist movements. Although Lukyanov said Tymoshenko has passed the peak of her political career due to excessive political maneuvering, she remains a force to be reckoned with. Boris Nemtsov of the Solidarity opposition movement suggested Yanukovych would face a powerful opposition in the person of Tymoshenko, saying Tymoshenko is more at home in opposition than in the Cabinet of Ministers.

BEYRLE